

F Post 3/8/77
Rep. Pryor to head probe committee

WASHINGTON (AP) — Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill said Monday he's ready to ask the House whether Chairman Henry Gonzalez' resignation from the fractured House assassinations committee should be accepted.

The committee met Monday without Gonzalez, and a member said it was now ready to get into "substantive issues" in its investigation of the John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. assassinations. He also disputed Gonzalez' charge that there were attempts to scuttle the Kennedy investigation.

O'Neill previously had said he wanted to talk to Gonzalez before asking the House to vote on the question but said Monday he now is ready to act as soon as technical details can be worked out.

Gonzalez resigned last week after the committee refused to support his at-

tempt to fire the committee's chief counsel, Richard A. Sprague.

At its meeting Monday, the committee voted itself power to hire and fire staff. Asked if this authority will be used against Sprague, Rep. Richardson Preyer, D-N.C., said the committee "will use that authority responsibly."

Preyer, who chaired the committee

National news scene

session, said he had made no decision personally on whether to vote to fire Sprague but said allegations such as one by Gonzalez that Sprague refused an order to cut the staff's costs will be discussed.

It was Preyer who told newsmen the committee will be "moving into

substantive issues" in the next two weeks in its probe of the two assassinations. He said he could not say what those issues are before briefings from two subcommittee staffs.

But Chairman Walter Fauntroy of the subcommittee investigating the King assassination said he will formally propose public hearings on that murder in the next two weeks with James Earl Ray among the witnesses.

A lawyer says Ray, serving 99 years in prison on conviction of killing King, says he's willing to testify on condition he is allowed to spell out his contention that conspirators killed the civil rights leader and set him up to take the blame.

Preyer read the committee a letter from Gonzalez saying he could not call a meeting because he no longer considered himself chairman.

- -